

Helen Keller's Bible Notes

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APH has one of the volumes of Helen Keller's Bible: Volume X, the book of Psalms. This version of the Bible is the King James Version. It was published in 1928 and printed in braille grade one and a half for the American Bible Society Bible House (Park Avenue and 57th Street, New York). Underneath that, it says, "American Printing House for the Blind Louisville, KY."

Aside from this tome being almost 100 years old, it is special because braille grade one and a half is not seen anymore. Today, braille has grade 1 (which is composed of just the letters) and grade 2 (which is composed of contractions, i.e. shortcuts like the sh and er signs or whole word contractions where c equals can). Braille grade one and a half was composed of 44 contractions whereas grade 2 has 189 contractions. Read this [article from Duxbury Systems](#) to learn more.

My research focused on what psalms Helen ran her fingers over again and again, meaning I had to find where the braille was faded/worn. Newly embossed braille is crisp, like feeling a pinecone under your fingers. When you read braille words multiple times, the sharp pinecone feeling dulls until it's like touching a grain of rice. The dots are legible, but could be squashed to nothing if not handled with care. Helen was a religious person, so feeling the verses with which she lovingly connected is almost like I'm with her, and God, in real life.

To find where the braille was faded, I felt each page of Helen's Bible. When most braille books sit on a shelf or are displayed, pages near the binding, pages near the back, and the bottoms of pages can get really worn. I focused my fingers and picked out six pages that I felt were the most worn and transcribed them below. Each page had the verse numbers on it. So, if the book was open, the leftmost page of the book had verse numbers on the left. The rightmost page had verse numbers on the right. At the bottom of each page was the psalm number(s) and their verses as well as the page number of the Bible itself. However, the leftmost pages did not have the Bible page number. I put that in parentheses as a reference. I transcribed each page as I felt it and have formatted it accordingly.

Here is a list of the transcribed pages:

- Ps. 8:7-9; 9:1-6 (2198)
- Ps. 23:6; 24:1-8 2223
- Ps. 77:19-20; 78:1-7 2319
- Ps. 81:1-10 (2330)
- Ps. 123:3-4; 124:1-7 2415
- Ps. 136:25-26; 137:1-7 2427

Notice that it was always the start of certain psalms that Helen favored: 9, 24, 78, 81, 124, and 137. As expected, the closer the psalm was to the back of the volume and the more Helen read it, the harder it was for me to decipher. In addition, when I read braille, I use my left hand to track the lines down as my right hand moves across them. As a result, it was much easier for me to read the verse numbers when they appeared on the left on the leftmost pages. I have also been a braille reader for almost 25 years, and it was a struggle reading braille grade one and a half when I'm used to reading grade 2. Transcribing the pages was not the easiest either as my braille display outputs in grade 2, so I had to constantly go back and check the wording. Nevertheless, it was an honor touching Helen's Bible.

I asked Justin Gardner, our AFB Helen Keller Archivist, to comment on how he thought the pages looked. To me, the worn text felt like it was losing its tactility, but visually, I was interested in hearing his thoughts. He said psalms 8 and 9 look good visually. The braille looks flattened but the paper looks good for psalms 23 and 24. Psalm 81 looks worn, and psalm 123 looks dirty. Psalm 137 looks the most worn. Justin mentioned he can see the paper fibers, and I had trouble reading the words the closer I got to the bottom of the page, but frankly the entire page was fragile feeling. Also, Justin commented on how flattened braille looks like a squished marshmallow.

Each page of psalms is transcribed below with a page break between each one. From a religious standpoint, it might be interesting to study the verses more thoroughly to see how Helen connected with them on a spiritual level.

dominion over the works of thy hands; thou
hast put all things under his feet:

7 All sheep and oxen, yea, and the
8 beasts of the field; The fowl of the
air, and the fish of the sea, and whatso-
ever passeth through the paths of the seas.

9 O LORD our Lord, how excel-
lent is thy name in all the earth!

Psalm 9.

1 I will praise thee, O LORD, with
my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy
2 marvellous works. I will be glad and
rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to
3 thy name, O thou most High. When
mine enemies are turned back, they shall
4 fall and perish at thy presence. For thou
hast maintained my right and my cause;
thou satest in the throne judging right.
5 Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou
hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast
6 put out their name for ever and ever. O
thou enemy, destructions are come to
a perpetual end: and thou hast destroyed
cities; their memorial is perished with

Ps. 8:7-9; 9:1-6 (2198)

oil; my cup runneth over. Surely 6
goodness and mercy shall follow me all the
days of my life: and I will dwell in the
house of the LORD for ever.

Psalm 24.

The earth is the LORD's, and the ful- 1
ness thereof; the world, and they that dwell
therein. For he hath founded it upon the 2
seas, and established it upon the
floods. Who shall ascend into the hill of 3
the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy
place? He that hath clean hands, and a 4
pure heart; who hath not lifted up his
soul unto vanity, nor sworn de-
ceitfully. He shall receive the 5
blessing from the LORD, and righteousness
from the God of his salvation. This is 6
the generation of them that seek him, that
seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah.

Lift up your heads, O ye 7
gates, and be ye lift up, ye ever-
lasting doors; and the King of glory shall
come in. Who is this King of glory? 8
The LORD strong and mighty, the
Ps. 23:6; 24:1-8 2223

world: the earth trembled and shook. Thy 19
way is in the sea, and thy path in the
great waters, and thy footsteps are not
known. Thou leddest thy people like a flock 20
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Psalm 78.

Give ear, O my people, to my law: 1
incline your ears to the words of my
mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: 2
I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we 3
have heard and known, and our fathers have told
us. We will not hide them from their chil- 4
dren, shewing to the generation to come the
praises of the LORD, and his strength,
and his wonderful works that he hath
done. For he established a testi- 5 (i in testimony is stained brown)
mony in Jacob, and appointed a law in
Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that
they should make them known to their chil-
dren: That the generation to come might 6
know them, even the children which should
be born; who should arise and declare
them to their children: That they might 7
set their hope in God, and not forget the
Ps. 77:19-20; 78:1-7 2319

Psalm 81.

1 Sing aloud unto God our strength:
make a joyful noise unto the God of
2 Jacob. Take a psalm, and bring
hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with
3 the psaltery. Blow up the trumpet in the
new moon, in the time appointed, on our
4 solemn feast day. For this was a
statute for Israel, and a law of the
5 God of Jacob. This he ordained in
Joseph for a testimony, when he went
out through the land of Egypt: wherever I
heard a language that I understood
6 not. I removed his shoulder from the bur-
den: his hands were delivered from the pots.
7 Thou calledst in trouble, and I de-
livered thee; I answered thee in the secret
place of thunder: I proved thee at the
8 waters of Meribah. Selah. Hear,
O my people, and I will testify unto thee:
O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto
9 me; There shall no strange god be in
thee; neither shalt thou worship any
10 strange god. I am the LORD thy
Ps. 81:1-10 (2330)

as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her
mistress; so our eyes wait upon the
LORD our God, until that he have mercy
upon us. Have mercy upon us, O 3
LORD, have mercy upon us: for we are
exceedingly filled with contempt. Our 4
soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning
of those that are at ease, and with the con-
tempt of the proud.

Psalm 124.

If it had not been the LORD who 1
was on our side, now may Israel
say; If it had not been the LORD 2
who was on our side, when men rose up
against us: Then they had swallowed us 3
up quick, when their wrath was kindled
against us: Then the waters had over- 4
whelmed us, the stream had gone over our
soul: Then the proud waters had gone 5
over our soul. Blessed be the 6
LORD, who hath not given us as a prey
to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as 7
a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the
snare is broken, and we are escaped.

Ps. 123:3-4; 124:1-7 2415

his mercy endureth for ever. Who 25
giveth food to all flesh: for his mer-
cy endureth for ever. O give thanks 26
unto the God of heaven: for his mercy
endureth for ever.

Psalm 137.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we 1
sat down, yea, we wept, when we re-
membered Zion. We hanged our harps 2
upon the willows in the midst thereof. For 3
there they that carried us away captive re-
quired of us a song; and they that wasted us
required of us mirth, saying, Sing us
one of the songs of Zion. How shall we 4
sing the LORD's song in a strange
land? If I forget thee, O Jerusa- 5
lem, let my right hand forget her
cunning. If I do not remember thee, 6
let my tongue cleave to the roof of
my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem
above my chief joy. Remember, O 7
LORD, the children of Edom in the day
of Jerusalem; who said, Raise it,
raise it, even to the foundation
Ps. 136:25-26; 137:1-7 2427